



from **plan** to **do.**



'From Plan to Do' is the project title which emerged for the proposal 'Dublin City Sustainable Energy Communities – from Planning to Prototyping our Climate Action'.







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SEC Program  
(opportunities)

WITH  
OF  
ACTS.

Making  
it  
joyful!

Engagement  
Process  
Impact



# Introduction

“From Plan to Do” set out to bridge the gap that many Sustainable Energy Communities (SECs) face in transitioning from detailed planning to practical action.

Through a comprehensive service design approach involving discovery workshops, research interviews, co-design methodologies, and prototyping, this project aimed to identify the barriers faced by SECs and develop a tangible roadmap to empower these communities.

Initial research highlighted that while SECs are enthusiastic and driven by a collective mission, they often struggle with volunteer bandwidth, technical expertise, lack of project management experience, and the complex processes associated with project finding and implementation. The findings underscored the reliance of the SEC scheme on volunteer efforts and the administrative burdens that can stifle momentum. Additionally, community engagement challenges were evident, especially in including underrepresented groups.

Through targeted co-design and persona workshops, the project developed actionable strategies to engage communities more effectively. One innovative approach was the “Climate Chats and Chips” co-design workshop, which specifically focused on renters—a group often overlooked in community energy planning.

Prototyping was essential to this process, particularly in developing and testing resources like a renter’s booklet. This accessible guide offered practical, low-cost solutions for energy efficiency and sustainability that were tailored to renters’ unique challenges. The prototype was codesigned with the community and tested through community events, gathering valuable feedback that informed iterative improvements. The final version of the booklet was printed and distributed, fostering peer-to-peer knowledge sharing and community cohesion. A project template was also prototyped, to help SECs outline a project plan, and define actionable steps. This template also included prompts for co-design and prototyping to encourage SECs to include these methodologies in their project implementation.



To centralise resources and enhance the accessibility of these findings, the [FromPlanToDo.ie](https://www.fromplanto.do) website was launched. This digital hub features tools including the DIY Community Template designed to streamline project execution for SECs. Interactive features, like “Find Your Fit”, “Find your Focus” and “Find Your Flow,” provide comprehensive guidance from team role alignment, to project planning and prototyping.

An SEC Networking Event further strengthened the collaborative spirit among SECs, showcasing practical applications of the tools developed during the project and fostering new partnerships. Attendees left with actionable ideas and renewed motivation, ready to integrate these resources into their community initiatives. This event highlighted the importance of continuous feedback and adaptive learning, contributing to a supportive network for ongoing SEC development.

Overall, “From Plan to Do” demonstrated that taking a service design approach can effectively support SECs in transitioning from the planning phase to impactful, community-led action. By utilising research, co-design, meaningful community engagement, and prototyping, the project equipped SECs with practical tools and sustainable strategies that promote inclusivity, participation, and long-term success.

The project received the IDI Irish Design Award for Service & Strategic Design in November 2024.

**Activity 1:**  
Secondary Research  
Output: Analysis of EMPs detailed research insights documented

**Goal:** Understand systemic and practical challenges hindering SECs from progressing past the planning phase. Identify common obstacles and opportunities for service design exploration  
**Impact:** Gained a comprehensive understanding of barriers and potential service design solutions, providing a foundation for subsequent workshops and initiatives.

**Activity 2:**  
Discovery Workshop  
Output: 40+ SEC Members engaged  
20+ SECs engaged

**Goal:** Engage SECs to gather insights on their collaboration structures and challenges. Validate research findings through direct community interactions.  
**Impact:** Highlighted effective and ineffective collaboration strategies, leading to a better understanding of SEC needs and priorities.

**Activity 3:**  
Interviews  
Output: 9 SECs engaged and 12 Interviews

**Goal:** Capture the diverse challenges faced by various SECs, focusing on both successful and struggling groups. Identify best practices and stakeholder perspectives.  
**Impact:** Provided a detailed view of challenges such as volunteer limitations and technical knowledge gaps, influencing tailored support resources.

**Activity 4:**  
Visioning Workshop  
Output: 9 SEC Members engaged

**Goal:** Create a unified vision for SECs by exploring past achievements and future initiatives.  
**Impact:** Clarified strategic directions, improved visibility of impactful projects, and supported long-term communication frameworks.

**Activity 5:**  
Persona Workshop  
Output: 9 SEC Members engaged

**Goal:** Develop user personas to better design solutions for different community demographics.  
**Impact:** Improved inclusivity and targeted outreach strategies, ensuring projects resonated with diverse groups like renters and families.



**Activity 6:**  
Renter's Co-Design  
Workshop  
Output: 13 Renters  
engaged in person  
50+ Renters  
reached online

**Goal:** Engage renters, an often-overlooked group, in the co-design process to foster inclusive solutions.  
**Impact:** Strengthened relationships between renters and community leaders, generated actionable ideas, and established collaborative networks.

**Activity 7:**  
Renter's Booklet  
Prototype  
Output: 185  
Booklets distributed  
150 + members of  
the public engaged

**Goal:** Develop a resource with renter-sourced, practical solutions for energy efficiency.  
**Impact:** Provided renters with an actionable, relatable tool, fostering engagement and community-driven sustainability efforts.

**Activity 8:**  
DIY Community  
Template Workbook  
Output: 16+  
SECs engaged

**Goal:** Empower SECs to independently project manage and execute initiatives.  
**Impact:** Improved volunteer engagement and scalability of projects, facilitating broader community participation.

**Activity 9:**  
FromPlanToDo.ie  
Output: Published  
project website

**Goal:** Centralise resources and support SECs in transitioning from planning to action.  
**Impact:** Streamlined project planning and enhanced collaboration among SECs, contributing to increased efficiency and adoption of resources.

**Activity 10:**  
SEC Networking  
Event  
Output: 16+  
SECs engaged

**Goal:** Strengthen collaboration among SECs and share insights and best practices.  
**Impact:** Fostered cross-SEC collaborations, shared renter-specific solutions, and garnered feedback to refine tools for broader application.





# Project Introduction

“From Plan to Do” is a Climate Action project that was born of the desire to show that people-centred service design could be applied to a public policy challenge to enhance climate action.

Proposed against the backdrop of the publication of “Designing Our Public Services – Design Principles for Government in Ireland” (2022), the project aimed to demonstrate the value of these principles, in practice, and with the goal of climate action.

Context Studio worked with partners Dublin City Council, Zero Carbon, and CODEMA to identify a challenge which might be a good “fit” for this approach.

The challenge identified was a quintessential “wicked” challenge, the kind that is common in the complex field of public policy. Ireland’s climate targets require a step-change in how we consume energy. A major pillar of policy in achieving these targets is the retrofitting of homes and buildings, and a key catalyst of that action is the Sustainable Energy Communities (SEC) scheme of the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland.

At the outset of this project there were already hundreds of SEC’s established across Ireland, diverse in their nature but all aiming to achieve their own climate impact. Those included 39 communities in the Dublin area, of differing levels of maturity. Anecdotal evidence suggested many were not getting past their initial “Energy Master Plan” phase, their efforts not translating into meaningful climate action.

And so, this became a project with two goals – the first, was to better understand SEC’s, their challenges, and to design and test creative ways to overcome those challenges – achieving meaningful climate impact. The second, was to do so while demonstrating that the creative process of people-centred service design, including research, co-design, and prototyping, is a powerful tool in the realm of public policy and public service.

Context Studio partnered with Connecting Cabra SEC, one of Dublin’s most vibrant and active sustainable energy

communities, and through partners connected with SECs across the country in a project that consisted of three phases:

**Phase 1: Design Research**

Setting out through desk research, interviews, discovery workshops, and other methods – to better understand the lived experience of diverse SECs across the country.

**Phase 2: Co-Design**

Partnering closely with Connecting Cabra SEC, working to apply the learnings from research, and design, with the community, facilitating new initiatives for community engagement, and decarbonisation.

**Phase 3: Prototyping**

Taking forward concepts from co-design, testing them with people, learning and iterating on their detail, as well as sharing these new tools with the wider network of SECs.

During the project, the work came to the attention of the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, to whom all partners are grateful for the insight shared and support offered. As the urgency of Ireland’s climate challenge increases, and as public administration turns to design as a transformation process, we believe this project shows how service design can be applied in complex contexts, to create both tangible outputs and intangible value.

<b>Context Studio</b>	John Lynch Hannah Rooney Áine Power Rebecca Fagan Sean Casey Harry Cloney Tim Dalton	Design Director Service Design Lead and Project Lead Service Designer and Prototyping Lead Senior Service Designer and Template Lead Service Designer and Website Lead Service Designer and Co-Design Activity Lead Senior Service Designer
<b>SEC's</b>	Caitríona Kenny Ger O'Halloran Michelle Nolan Stephanie Dickenson India Ryan	Connecting Cabra Project Lead Connecting Cabra Participant Connecting Cabra Participant Triple SEC Project Participant Triple SEC Project Participant
<b>Dublin City Council</b>	Sabrina Dekker Darby Mullins	DCC Project Lead DCC Project Participant
<b>Zero Carbon</b>	Gerard Doherty	Mentor Project Advisor



# Project Overview

## Phase 1: Design Research



The primary aim of this project was to identify the core challenges preventing Sustainable Energy Communities (SECs) from progressing from the planning stage to actionable initiatives.

Community (CHALLENGES)

COMMUNITY CHALLENGES - 2020-2021 - CAN'T RETROFIT

Older population not want to get loan to retrofit

FEEL IT'S TOO LATE (THESE LIVES HAVE ALREADY SURVIVED SO ON)

LACK OF CONFIDENCE

Not understanding what is involved in retrofitting vast amount of info available

Scepticism of sales people in the industry

CHALLENGE: BAD PROGRAMME

FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS

Otherwise engaged - more pressing issues [poverty, housing etc]

COSTS and COST BENEFIT

THE IDEA THAT CHANGE IS TOO EXPENSIVE

1. LACK OF VOLUNTEERS

Fear of change of doing wrong

FINANCE

SEC Program (CHALLENGES)

Technical Knowledge

PUBLIC SCEPTICISM

Energy Constraints

Energy Constraints

Technical Challenges

Community (Opportunities)

CONSENSUS

Multimedia - print, online, infographics, lectures

Resistant & consistent

PEOPLES EXPERIENCE IF WE CAN

ACTIONS

Focusing on individual benefits

Engaging with established groups

OPEN DAYS

COMPANIONSHIP - A PAIR OF GREENIES

SHOULD BE SUCCESSFUL EXPERIENCES

SEC Program (Opportunities)

Mentorship

EARLY ENTHUSIASM

Making it joyful!

## Research Objectives

- Understand the underlying reasons that cause SECs to become stalled during the planning phase, examining systemic and practical challenges that hinder practical action.
- Identify the common obstacles that SECs encounter when attempting to implement projects and create tangible community impacts.
- Compile a comprehensive list of key challenges faced by SECs, distinguishing between those that are systemic in nature and those that can be addressed through targeted service design, co-design, prototyping, and knowledge sharing.
- Learn from successful SECs with proven records in project execution, to uncover the factors contributing to their success and how these insights could inform broader practices of SECs.
- Develop a curated set of best practices derived from successful SECs, ensuring these learnings can be effectively shared and scaled to benefit SECs across the country. Prototyping a central hub for these insights was a critical step towards making resources practical, accessible, and adaptable for widespread use.

## Activity 1: Secondary Research

- Conducted an in-depth review of existing materials on the challenges faced by Sustainable Energy Communities (SECs).
- Analysed "Dingle Adapts" webinar series: Six webinars on energy adaptation and renewable energy in Dingle.
- Examined nine Energy Master Plans (EMPs): Identified common project approaches, barriers, and post-EMP challenges.









- Reviewed SEAI resources and supports: Assessed available assistance for SECs, grant options, and their accessibility.

## Activity 2: Discovery Workshops

The team organised and observed workshops for insights into SEC dynamics, challenges, and solutions. This was key for understanding SECs' collaboration structures and real-world challenges.

- Triple SEC workshop:
  - Included Cosybatter, Phibsboro SEC, and Connecting Cabra SEC.
  - Day-long session with participants sharing projects, challenges, and future ideas.
  - Focused on observing group interactions and identifying effective/ineffective collaboration strategies.
- Dundrum workshop:
  - Attended by 20+ participants from 14 SECs.
  - Featured activities for sharing early research findings and in-depth discussions on common obstacles.
  - Included collective brainstorming on potential project pathways.

## Activity 3: Interviews

The team conducted 12 one-hour remote interviews with SEC representatives across Ireland. Included both well-established and new SECs; some with successful projects, others struggling to get beyond planning.

- Identified diverse challenges:
  - Volunteer limitations
  - Technical knowledge gaps



"Dealing with the red tape is really frustrating. There's so much jumping through hoops..."



– Interviewed SEC Representative

- Community engagement variability
- Highlighted differences between rural and urban SECs, showing unique community needs as well as common challenges.
- Interviewed additional stakeholders:
  - SEC mentors
  - A focused series with five members of a well-established SEC for a holistic view of roles and perspectives.

These interviews provided valuable best practices and insights on enabling SECs to move from "Plan" to "Do" stages.

### Design Opportunities Identified

- How might we empower SECs to explore and implement decarbonisation projects beyond retrofitting, ensuring inclusivity for renters and underrepresented community members?
- How might we create structured, yet adaptable support frameworks that alleviate the administrative burden on volunteers and encourage broader participation within SECs?
- How might we use co-design and prototyping to build confidence and overcome hesitation within SECs, enabling them to turn initial ideas into actionable community projects?
- How might we help SECs maintain engagement and avoid burnout by diversifying their focus and leadership responsibilities across various climate action projects?
- How might we simplify the pathway for SECs to access funding and technical support, reducing the time and resources spent on complex application processes?
- How might we design community engagement strategies that build trust, foster inclusivity, and encourage long-term participation in sustainable energy projects?





Woman in a mustard-colored sweater writing on a yellow sticky note.

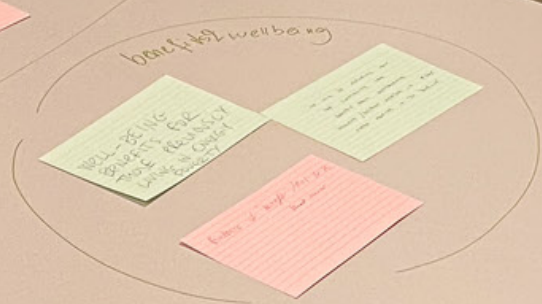
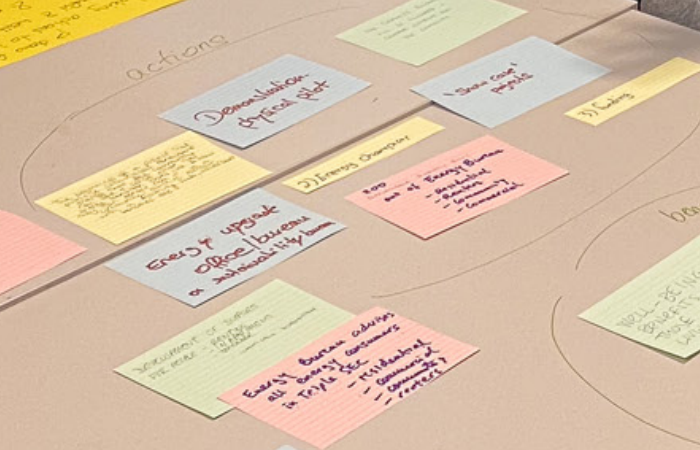
Woman in a dark jacket and green scarf standing with arms crossed, looking at the table.

Woman in a grey patterned sweater pointing at the table, looking thoughtful.

Woman in a black turtleneck holding a white cup, looking towards the group.

Man in a blue sweater and jeans holding a white cup, looking towards the group.

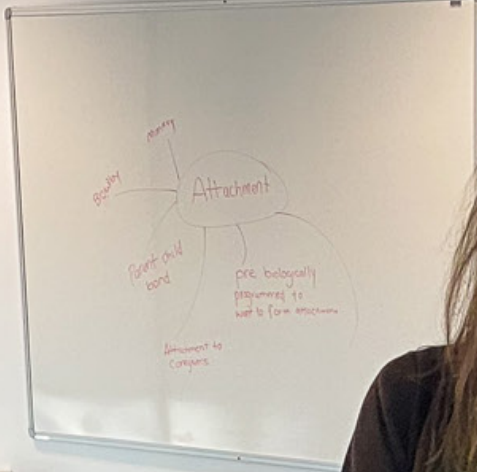
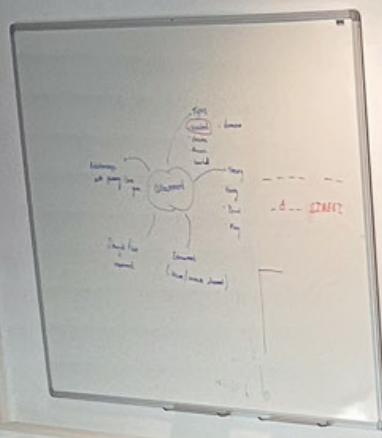
Yellow sticky note with handwritten text: "Energy 4 upgrade office houses in sustainability house"



Sticky note with text: "Website / document communication & empowerment"

Sticky note with text: "Energy open house"

Sticky note with text: "A physical plan on the required in other buildings"





# Project Overview

## Phase 2: Co-Design



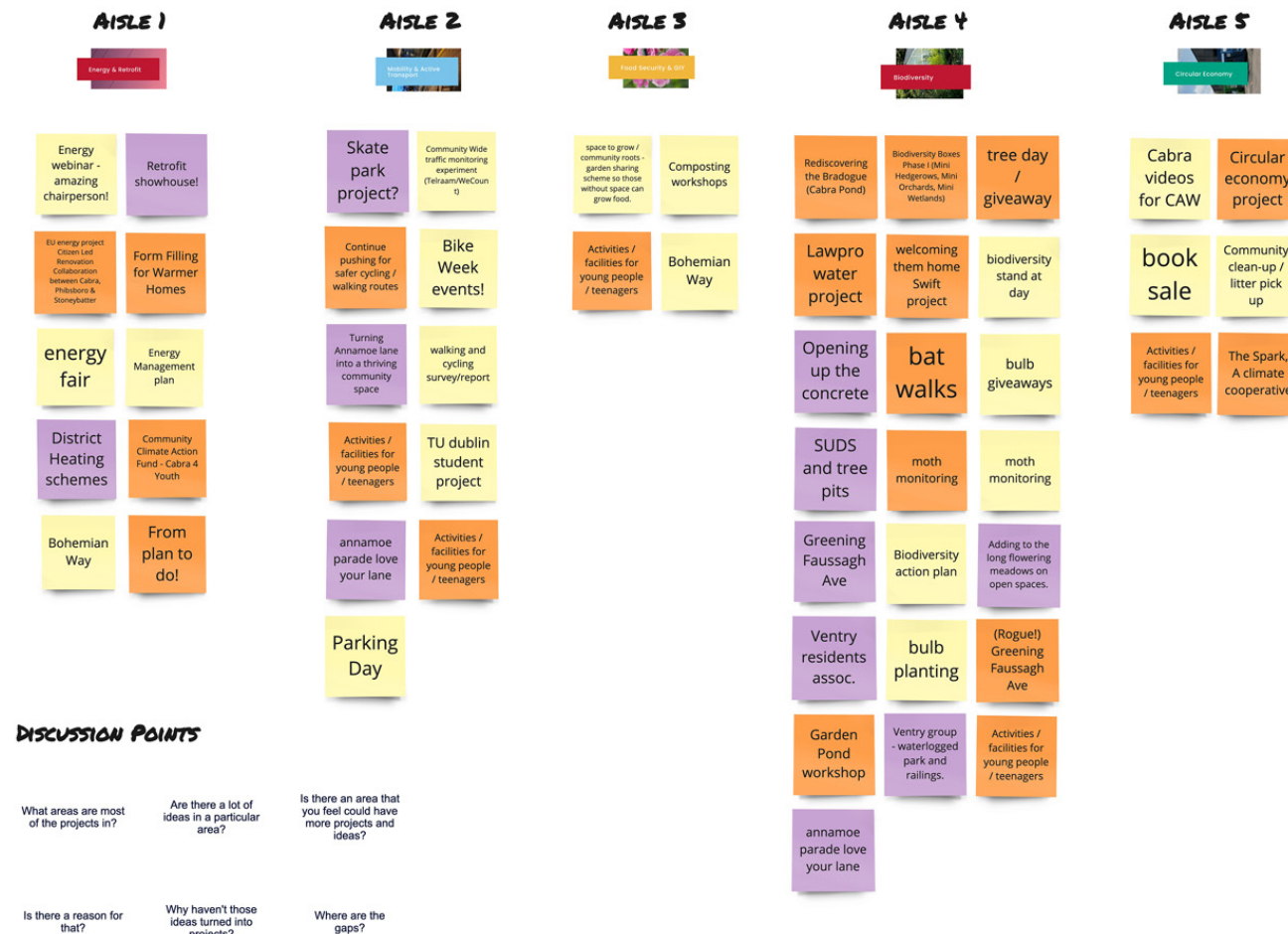
In Phase 2, the project shifted from research to collaborative action, partnering closely with Connecting Cabra SEC to co-create practical solutions.

This phase leveraged the insights gained from initial research to design initiatives that addressed real community need.

Through interactive workshops, participatory events, and collaborative brainstorming, the co-design process empowered SEC members and local people to contribute ideas, ensuring that proposed solutions were relevant, inclusive, and aligned with the community's goals.

This phase emphasised the value of hands-on engagement and collective input, laying the groundwork for sustainable, community-driven projects.





Screenshot of a digital workboard from the Visioning Workshop.

## Activity 4: Visioning Workshop

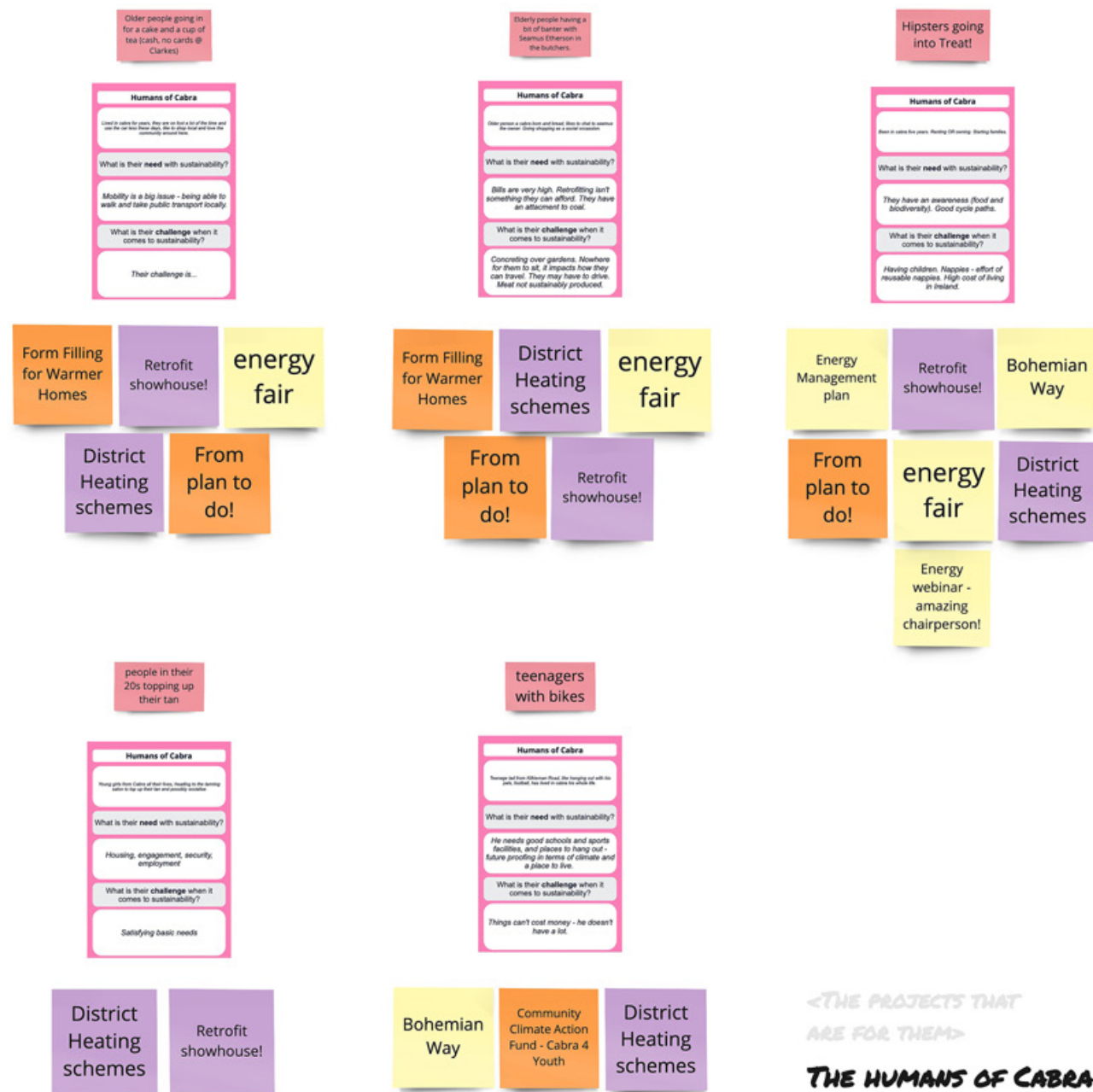
To initiate collaboration and create a unified vision, we designed a tailored visioning workshop for Connecting Cabra's Sustainable Energy Community (SEC). This session aimed to explore and document the SEC's past achievements, current projects, and potential future initiatives. Held online to maximise participation, the workshop employed the creative metaphor of a local shop as a framework. This helped participants think outside traditional planning models and view their projects through a community lens.

### Workshop Activities

- **Stock Inventory:** Participants began by listing previous and ongoing projects as “stock” within their metaphorical “shop”. This exercise not only documented their work but prompted reflection on successes and areas needing more focus.
- **Aisle Structuring:** Projects were grouped into thematic “aisles,” such as energy-saving initiatives, outreach programs, and educational workshops. This allowed the SEC to visually organise their activities and better understand the distribution of their efforts.
- **Front Window Display:** In this final step, the group discussed which projects the community sees first, focusing on visibility and impact. This activity spurred conversations about public perception and the need to highlight key projects that symbolise the SEC's mission.

### Long-term Impact

- **Strategic Clarity:** The workshop provided a clear vision for SEC's future, aligning projects with the community's needs and focusing on initiatives with the highest potential impact.
- **Increased Visibility:** By identifying which projects resonate



Screenshot of a digital workboard from the Persona Workshop.

most with the community, the SEC was better equipped to showcase their efforts, fostering stronger community engagement.

- Sustained Framework for Communication: The visioning session formed the foundation for long-term communication strategies, enabling the SEC to continually refine their approach as they grow.

### Activity 5: Persona Workshop

A follow-up persona workshop was conducted to deepen Connecting Cabra's understanding of the composition of the community that the group seeks to engage. Recognising the importance of designing for specific community needs, the workshop facilitated the creation of detailed personas to represent diverse local demographics.

#### Workshop Activities

- "Saturday Morning at the Shops" Exercise: Participants visualised their community through the lens of who they typically see at the local shops. This sparked the creation of relatable personas representing various groups, such as young families, elderly residents, and renters.
- Character Development: Each persona was fleshed out with characteristics, daily challenges, and their general attitudes toward sustainability. Participants described their fictional personas' conversations, pain points, and possible motivators for engaging with SEC projects.
- Focused Brainstorming: The group identified three primary personas to explore in-depth. They considered tailored solutions and brainstormed specific projects to meet these personas' needs, such as workshops on energy-saving tips for renters or events that build intergenerational knowledge-sharing.





### Outcomes

- **Enhanced Community Understanding:** The workshop gave the SEC a deeper insight into the diverse needs and motivations of the local population, ensuring that future initiatives would be more inclusive and targeted.
- **Tailored Outreach Strategies:** The persona insights informed the creation of more personalised outreach programs, improving engagement with specific groups like renters or young families.
- **Refined Project Design:** Personas helped shape concrete project ideas that were both relevant and effective, increasing the likelihood of successful outcomes.

### Long-Term Impact

- **Inclusive Programming:** The creation of personas ensured that SEC projects would address the needs of more community members, leading to stronger, more diverse participation.
- **Sustainable Engagement:** The refined outreach strategies set a foundation for continued, meaningful community engagement, increasing the SEC's relevance over time.
- **Adaptable Model for Future Workshops:** The persona creation process became a model for future community workshops, supporting long-term capacity to adapt and innovate in line with community needs.

### Activity 6: Renter's Co-Design Workshop

Given that renters form a significant portion of Cabra's population but are often overlooked in community planning, we developed a workshop specifically for them. The "Climate Chats and Chips" event aimed to foster an informal, approachable atmosphere, encouraging active participation through food and casual conversation.









### Activities

- **Building a Home Exercise:** Attendees worked in groups to create visual representations of typical rental homes, using large boards and post-it notes to illustrate common problems renters face such as drafts, mould, and damp spots. This hands-on approach allowed participants to engage deeply and share personal stories that connected back to larger sustainability themes.
- **Wildcard Prompts:** Facilitators provided small cards with hypothetical scenarios—like unexpected leaks or rising utility costs—to help groups brainstorm comprehensive solutions. These prompts kept discussions dynamic and inspired more creative thinking.
- **Community Helpers:** Each table had cutout figures symbolising “helpers” like local tradespeople, volunteer groups, or neighbor collectives. This exercise explored how community support networks could address renter-specific challenges collaboratively.

### Outcomes

- **Stronger Sense of Community:** The casual, food-based format fostered a more open dialogue and led to stronger relationships between renters and local community leaders.
- **Actionable Ideas:** The workshop produced a series of practical solutions for renters, including retrofitting ideas and a guide for energy-efficient home fixes.
- **Collaborative Networks:** Participants recognised the importance of working together on shared challenges, leading to the creation of informal support networks that would continue beyond the workshop.

### Long-Term Impact

- **Ongoing Renter Advocacy:** The solutions generated during the workshop provided a foundation for long-term advocacy



# HOM



Rugs

Keep door/  
window  
open

Sealant  
tiles

COMPLAIN  
TO LANDLORD

Dehumidifiers

Hot water  
bottles -  
assortment!

Through  
wind  
radiators

Draft  
excludes @  
bottom of  
doors

If too hot -  
reflective  
sheets for  
windows

Perspex  
temporary  
window glaze

warm/  
thick

for  
windows

Someone  
with





"I learned that people are really interested in working together to find solutions, and there's a lot of energy for that... It made me feel actually — hopeful."

and support for renters, empowering them towards decarbonisation, ensuring their needs are considered in future community initiatives.

- Sustained Engagement with Renters: By fostering ongoing relationships with this key demographic, the SEC is poised to engage renters as active participants in future sustainability efforts.
- Community-Driven Solutions: The collaborative approach to problem-solving created a blueprint for future community-driven sustainability projects, which can be replicated in other areas.



– 'Climate Chips and Chats'  
Workshop Participant



# Project Overview

## Phase 3: Prototyping



Phase 3 centered on transforming co-designed ideas into actionable tools through testing and refinement. By prototyping resources such as the renter's booklet and DIY Community Template, and gathering feedback at community events, this phase ensured solutions were practical, user-friendly, and aligned with community needs. The iterative process reinforced adaptability and helped SECs confidently move from planning to implementation.



## Activity 7: Renter's Booklet Prototype

The [Renter's Booklet](#) was created during the “Climate Chats and Chips” workshop, where renters shared their daily challenges and sustainable living solutions. With the aim of helping renters improve the energy efficiency of their homes without large financial investments, the booklet provides accessible, practical solutions for issues like insulation, dampness, and mould.

### Design and Content Development

The booklet was designed to present community-reviewed, renter-sourced information, making it feel personal and relatable. It included step-by-step guides for DIY solutions like creating draft excluders and natural mould-cleaning remedies. The content was structured into practical sections, including “Cold Solutions” and “Mould Solutions”, with an emphasis on low-cost, actionable steps.

### Key Features:

- **Step-by-Step Guides:** Simple instructions for energy-saving projects, such as DIY draft excluders and homemade mould cleaning recipes.
- **Relational Elements:** A community bulletin board, with spaces for renters to share tips and experiences, making the booklet feel like a living document.
- **Illustrations:** Hand-drawn images, sourced from workshop participants, brought a personal, approachable feel, enhancing the booklet's accessibility.
- **A5 Home Printer Compatible Format:** Designed in A5 format so it only requires folding a standard A4 page. This practical choice allows SECs to use standard inkjet printers, avoiding the need for professional printing services or custom cutting. The use of common materials simplifies reproduction, making it quick and affordable.





"Guides don't often answer the questions you have, but I feel like this is all really actionable... It's like a little bible."



– BuzzFest Event Participant

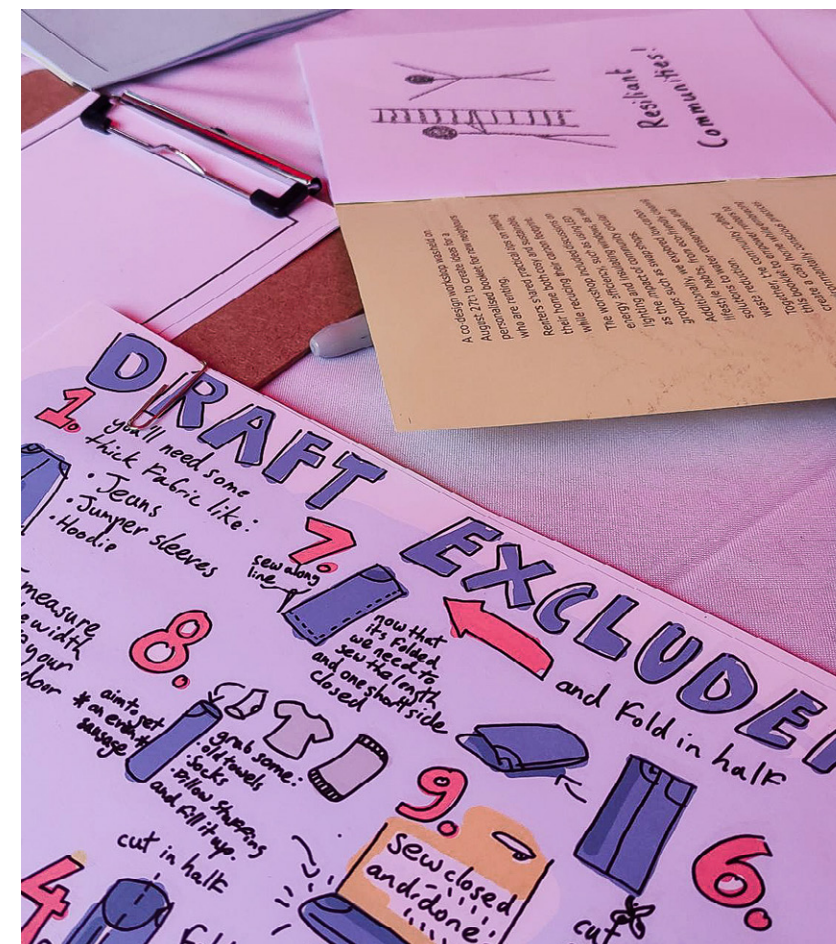
for communities to distribute valuable information independently, even with limited resources.

### Testing and Iteration Process

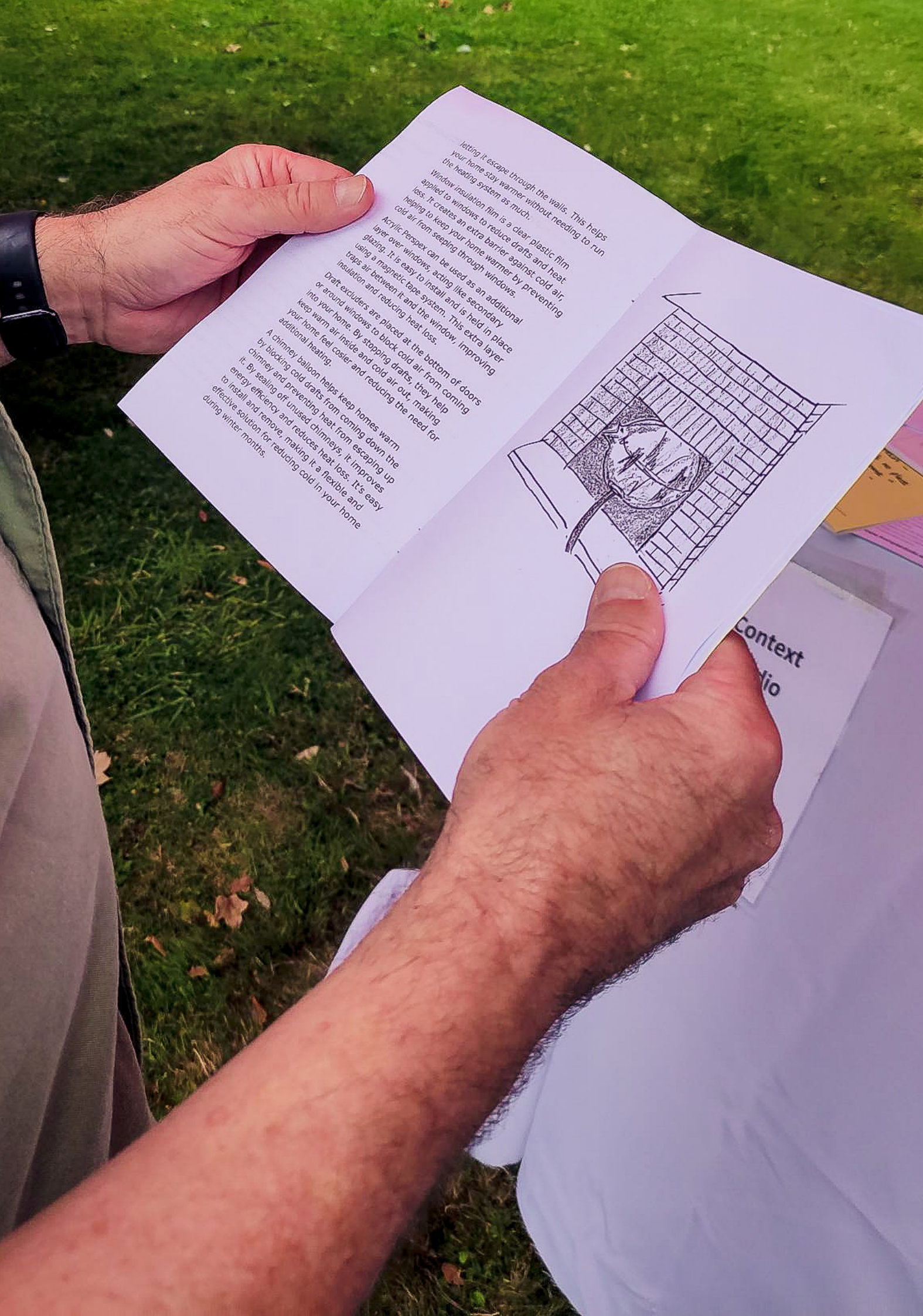
Two versions of the booklet were created and tested through different channels to gauge effectiveness and appeal:

- **Survey Testing:** A pop-up activity at The Digital Hub in Dublin 8 allowed renters to interact with the booklet and provide feedback. Each booklet featured a QR code linking to an online survey where participants could choose which version they preferred and offer suggestions.
- **Public Testing:** Booklets were also tested at community events, such as "Eat The Streets" and "BuzzFest" in Phibsboro, where public feedback was gathered through informal conversations and structured interviews. Renters were particularly engaged with the "mould recipe" and appreciated the peer-generated, actionable tips that felt grounded in real-life experiences.
- **Voting System:** A voting system was set up to choose between digital and printed formats. The physical format won overwhelmingly, as participants felt that a printed booklet was easier to share and use as a conversation starter—an essential tool for community building among renters.
- **Public Launch:** We had a public launch of the booklets at Triple SEC's Retrofitting showcase day in Bohemian Football Club's Climate Co-Op. We engaged with a wide cohort of the community. They were very interested in the booklet as the tips were incredibly helpful for them while they got started on their retrofitting journey to be able to mitigate damp and cold in their homes while they waited for their retrofitting journey to begin.









### Outcomes from Testing

- **Practicality:** Renters found the solutions immediately actionable, with many mentioning they would try the suggested improvements right away.
- **Community Engagement:** The bulletin board concept and spaces for writing notes were popular, with many renters seeing the booklet as a tool for fostering community interactions. This might help renters connect with one another, reducing isolation and increasing their collective impact on sustainability.
- **Improved Visual Design:** Feedback highlighted the importance of visuals, especially the step-by-step illustrations, which made the instructions feel more approachable.
- **Physical Format Preference:** The tactile, physical version encouraged sharing and social engagement, further solidifying the booklet as a tool for community cohesion.

### Final Design and Implementation

- **Enhanced Visuals:** The final version incorporated more graphics and clearer visuals for each retrofitting step, including a detailed guide for creating a draft excluder.
- **Sustainability:** The booklet was printed on uncoated recycled paper to minimise environmental impact, aligning with the broader goals of decarbonisation.
- **Accessible Typeface:** Verdana was chosen for its legibility, ensuring the booklet was easy to read for a wide audience, including those with varying literacy levels.

### Long-Term Impact

- **Ongoing Resource for SECs:** A total of 185 renter's booklets were printed and distributed among SECs, serving as a resource to help renters take action on energy efficiency improvements in their homes. Its practical,



community-driven content continues to inspire renters to collaborate and support one another.

- **Fostering Community Action:** Beyond simply providing knowledge, the booklet has become a tool for building community engagement and collaboration among renters, encouraging them to take collective action on sustainability.
- **Replication in Other Communities:** The success of the booklet in Cabra has set the stage for adaptation in other areas, spreading its influence to a broader network of renters across different communities.

## Activity 8: DIY Community Template

The [DIY Community Template](#) was created to empower local volunteers, SEC groups, and renters to act in improving the energy efficiency of rented homes. The goal was to provide an easy-to-follow workbook that guides communities through the early stages of setting up their own DIY sustainability initiatives, such as building draught excluders, removable window insulators, and more.

### Design and Content Development

The workbook serves as a step-by-step guide that helps SEC groups plan and execute local energy-saving projects. It includes a template, action plan, and resources to support volunteers in initiating their projects, from the initial concept to the final installation.

### Key Features:

- **Detailed Framework:** The workbook outlines a clear structure for planning and organising DIY projects, focusing on practical retrofitting solutions that can be implemented quickly and cost-effectively.
- **Resources and Funding:** Links to external resources, funding opportunities, and local support systems were

integrated to help SEC groups move forward with their initiatives.

- **Real-World Examples:** Case studies and completed templates provided inspiration and guidance, helping SECs visualise the potential impact of their projects.
- **Co-Design Encouragement:** Sections of the template encouraged SECs to think about co-designing their projects with community members, ensuring that the solutions were relevant and participatory.

### Testing and Iteration Process

The initial workbook prototype was shared with a group of SEC volunteers, who tested it in real-life conditions and provided feedback on its usability and effectiveness, ultimately leading to iterative improvements and refinements.

- **Feedback Gathering:** Volunteers were asked to use the workbook to set up a mock DIY project in their community. They provided feedback on whether the instructions were clear, if the resources were helpful, and how the workbook could be improved.
- **Identified Gaps:** The first iteration of the workbook revealed gaps in resource allocation and project scaling. Volunteers highlighted the need for additional guidance on setting up group coordination and accessing materials.
- **Prototype Refinement:** In response to feedback, the workbook was updated with:
  - More resources and funding links to facilitate project initiation.
  - A detailed case study showing a completed project, helping volunteers see what an example should look like.
  - Additional worksheets for brainstorming and co-design projects, making it easier for community members to collaborate.



**Makes sense**

**Pictures are really helpful**

If there was a way to make it clearer what groups are involved, put in bold or highlight them in some way

Not terribly clear that there are more people involved than the SEC

Partnerships haven't been suggested for this issue in her experience

The importance of this in apartment blocks and apartment renters isn't change windows in an apt

**Millpark SEC**  
Dublin 2023  
SEAI Funded  
€5,000  
Thermal Energy Savings  
€3,200  
Carbon Savings  
1,361 kgCO<sub>2</sub>

**What?**  
Millpark Sustainable Energy Community identified an opportunity to assist those living in local rented accommodation to make their homes more energy efficient.

**Why?**  
Renters face unique barriers when trying to make their homes more energy efficient, with issues such as draughty windows and high energy bills impacting their ability to save energy and costs. Temporary, removable retrofits can enhance energy efficiency in the home, without making permanent changes to the housing structure. Community groups with skilled volunteers, such as Millpark DIY Shed, can gather their skills and materials to manufacture simple solutions to help renters.

**Project Steps**  
Millpark SEC decided to take action when hearing from local renters how difficult it is to progress energy efficiency. The Millpark DIY Shed was approached by the SEC for help already planning to help renters with window insulation - luckily, the SEC had already put pen to paper using our free guide to plan projects steps and make the idea from 'plan' to 'do'.

**Project Impact**  
Renters used energy kits from local fabricators to measure their homes energy efficiency before the window insulation was installed.  
On average, 23kgCO<sub>2</sub> in carbon savings was recorded over a 3 month period.

**Financial Savings**  
Renters saved on average 4% per month on their domestic energy bill.

**Local DIY Shed volunteer**  
"Building removable temporary window insulation has increased our community energy efficiency, while also empowering our renters to learn new skills!"

Collaborating with local hardware suppliers, GAA & Narn, they got to work building and distributing adjustable window insulators to renters.

**Alternative examples?** Another example is found in... Some extra examples to help people get thinking.

**Giving options, and showing flexibility in the plan.**

The case study is a big thing, written testimonial, if you can hear a story

A video, or some story about the benefits for everyone

Like the mention of the local hardware shops - last of the smaller shops that are still around

Really important to support them and connect that support

Use it as a marketing opportunity - from the hardware shop, make it attractive for the business and help if funding is an issue

Highlight the support of the business for the community members

Trying to understand the motivation - people are afraid 'there's no such thing as a free lunch'

When you come to knocking on doors - how do we get past the scepticism

Understanding the big win for the SEC in the environmental impact, generating more potential for hardware shops, warmer homes for renters

How do you ensure renters know that you're genuine

Being mindful of that landlord relationship, reassuring and giving consideration

Have a training piece around being wary that people might be absolutely terrified of their landlords

Prep something about reassuring people that they aren't upset a landlord

The relationship with the landlords as well - it's a tricky one

Prep something to say that's the wrong way of doing it so there's a way of doing it better

Gives you something to say that's the wrong way of doing it so there's a way of doing it better

Tricky piece is communication and outreach - the more nerve wracking things

Communication and relationship building skills are vital to this - and can be an interesting and difficult step

Tips about how to contact people (to contact people in groups / what's your groups)

### Getting Started

Use this template to map out what you'll need to get started

**What?**  
What will you create/build?  
Project name: [ ]  
Location: [ ]  
Start date: [ ]  
End date: [ ]

**Who?**  
Who will be involved?  
Milk SEC  
DIY Shed

**How?**  
What supports can you use to make it happen?  
GAA Club  
Narn  
Local area office as well

**What do we need?**  
**Materials**  
Pompen sheets  
Handmade/Modena  
Woolfibre  
Urethane  
Door  
Fitting frames

**Skills**  
Craftsmanship  
Project management  
Can use energy kits  
Engaging with renters  
Fitting frames

### Getting Started

Use this template to map out what you'll need to get started

**Project Plan**  
Use this section to identify your project goals. Breaking the plan down to smaller steps will make it easier to get started.

**What?**  
What will you create/build?  
Project name: [ ]  
Location: [ ]  
Start date: [ ]  
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**Who?**  
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Project management  
Can use energy kits  
Engaging with renters  
Fitting frames

Barrier - approaching people seems to be the most difficult

Once you get a willing building group then it's all happy days

Getting it out there is the tricky bit

Eg of water but collecting rainwater

They've tried door knocking - people don't open the door because they thought they were canvassing

Once you mention things like fit groups they'll spark lots of ideas of how else to reach this group

Help build trust! If you roll it out in one block it won't be as difficult to share it, and roll it out to other communities

Have content ready to go when things start rolling out. A bit of content to have that makes the solution easy to go for the SEC in their own words

### DIY: SOS Community Meitheal



#### What is it?

A workbook that facilitates mobilization of communities to utilize local skills to enhance energy efficiency of renters homes

A way for individual volunteers or existing SEC groups to get started making immediate impact on the ground locally

Understand what is missing to help SEC's get started

Any ideas or feedback to make this workbook easier to use and better for volunteers like you!

RETO FIT

RETO FIT is a glossary of terms that may be needed

#### Today's Goal

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Project name: [ ]  
Location: [ ]  
Start date: [ ]  
End date: [ ]

**What?** What will you create/build?  
Project name: [ ]  
Location: [ ]  
Start date: [ ]  
End date: [ ]

**How?** What supports can you use to make it happen?  
GAA Club  
Narn  
Local area office as well

**DIY Needs**  
Skills required:  
Materials required:

Checklist - if I don't have these 4 things, how do I get them?

Hardware person - free advertising

Initial Steps: 1, 2, 3, 4

### Choosing a retrofit

**Start with people**  
Who do I know with DIY skills?  
Who do I know who is an active volunteer?  
Are there existing community groups here I can contact?

**Start with research**  
Are there any estates or apartment blocks we can start with?  
What kind of temporary retrofits are documented online?  
Have other local communities published their case studies?

Background of Estate: [ ]  
Issues of concern: [ ]  
Non-technical: [ ]  
Costly to retrofit: [ ]  
High energy - EU guide: [ ]  
What are the barriers to retrofit? [ ]  
How much detail do they require to act? [ ]  
Links and database checks: [ ]  
Verifying the key info: [ ]  
Report impact in localised action: [ ]  
Informing the wider community: [ ]

Legal liability: [ ]  
retrofit walk: [ ]  
guidance and advice: [ ]

### Getting Started

**Who?** Who will be involved?  
Project name: [ ]  
Location: [ ]  
Start date: [ ]  
End date: [ ]

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Informing the wider community: [ ]

Legal liability: [ ]  
retrofit walk: [ ]  
guidance and advice: [ ]

Screenshot of a digital workboard from testing with SEC's.



## Getting Started

Use this template to map out what you'll need to get started

### Who is it for and what is it?

- Who are you hoping to help with this project? What will you create/build for them?

### Who can help?

- Who will be involved in helping you?

Most communities already have networks you can tap into if you're not sure who can help - you can find existing SECs listed on the SEAI website, or contact local DIY groups like Mens Shed, Tidy Towns or your Local Area Office

### How?

- What supports can you use to make it happen?

Top of mind for most groups are areas like finding funding\*. What is often overlooked are the kinds of methodologies required to bring your ideas to life. Activities like prototyping, persona mapping and co-design workshops can be imperative to moving 'from plan, to do!'

\*Don't forget, SEAI provide grant opportunities to community groups with documented plans to enhance community energy efficiency. Find out more on SEAI.ie.

Project Name:

Getting you from **plan** to **do**.

### What do we need?

- What materials and skillsets will be required for a successful project?

Materials

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Skills

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### Project Plan

- Use this section to identify your project goals. Breaking the plan down to smaller steps will make it easier to get started.

The goal of this project is to (what) \_\_\_\_\_  
 This will support (who) \_\_\_\_\_  
 We will do this by (how) \_\_\_\_\_

- Define the steps you'll need to take and the order you'll need to take them to get your project off the ground

Step 1 \_\_\_\_\_ Step 4 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Step 2 \_\_\_\_\_ Step 5 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Step 3 \_\_\_\_\_ Step 6 \_\_\_\_\_

### Moving 'From Plan, to Do'

- Use this section to think through what kind of co-design would be beneficial and how you might prototype this project idea.

**Co-Design**  
 Get ideas directly from the people you want to support with this project

How might we...  
 Co-design with our community?

**Prototype**  
 Test your idea in a small way, to then learn and iterate on it.

How might we...  
 Test our idea?

## Outcomes from Testing

- Improved Usability:** The updated workbook provided clearer instructions and a more comprehensive framework, allowing volunteers to move quickly from planning to execution.
- Higher Volunteer Engagement:** The workbook was found to be a valuable tool in increasing engagement among volunteers, who felt more empowered and confident in their ability to lead projects.
- Scalability:** The improvements made the workbook applicable to a broader range of DIY projects, making it easier for SECs to replicate and scale initiatives across different communities.

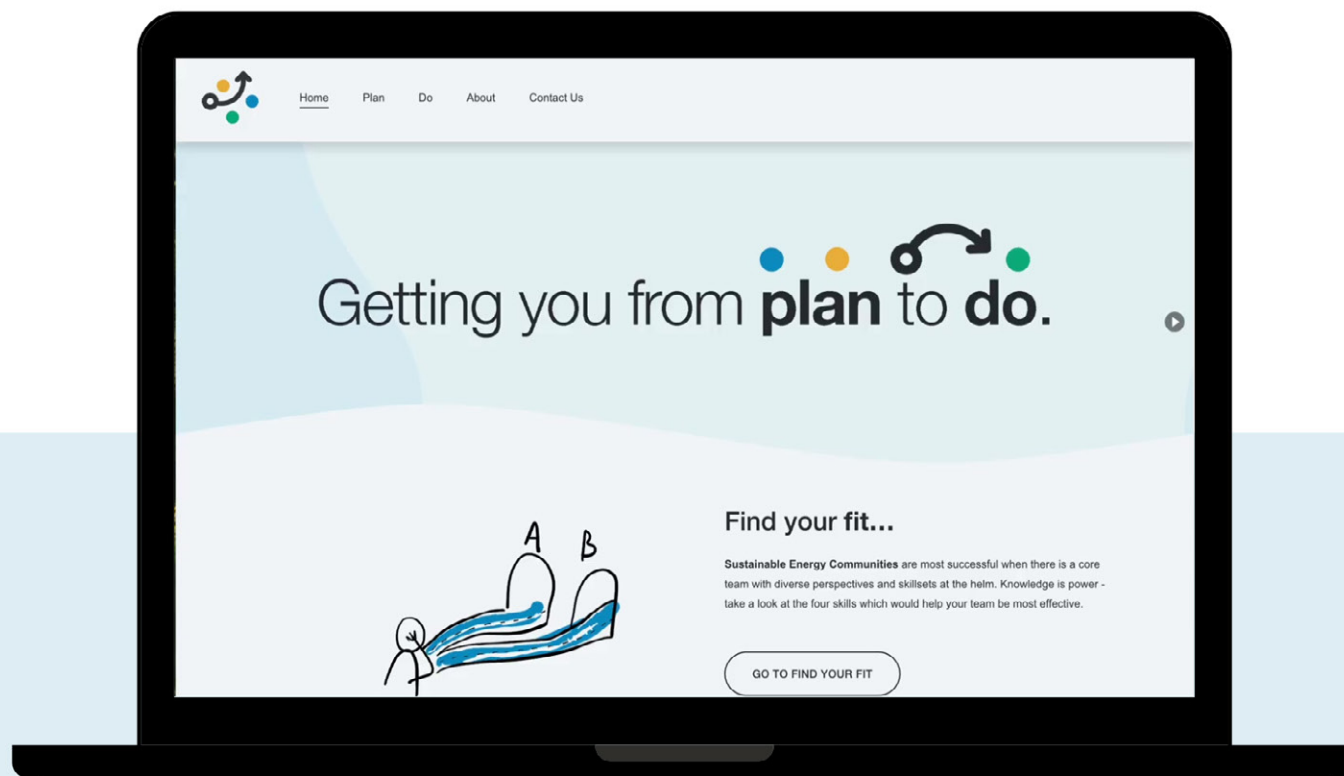
## Long-Term Impact

- Empowering Local Communities:** The DIY template provides a powerful tool for fostering local ownership of energy efficiency projects. It has encouraged SECs to take initiative and continue tackling sustainability challenges independently.
- Building Collaborative Networks:** The workbook has facilitated stronger collaboration between renters, volunteers, and SEC groups, ensuring long-term engagement with sustainability efforts.
- Adoption Across SECs:** The updated workbook has been included on the [FromPlanToDo.ie](https://www.fromplanto.do.ie) platform, making it accessible to a wide range of SECs across Ireland. Its success has paved the way for other regions to adopt similar DIY models for energy efficiency.

## Activity 9: FromPlanToDo.ie Website

To tie all these resources from co-design and prototyping together to share with SECs, we launched the [FromPlanToDo.ie](https://www.fromplanto.do.ie) website. This site was designed to be





more than an informational hub — it became a tool for SECs to streamline their initiatives from start to finish.

### Key Features of the Website

- Find Your Fit: A dynamic tool that helped SECs identify which team members could best contribute to their project's success, enhancing role alignment and awareness.
- Find Your Focus: Comprehensive guides on running community workshops and activities, ensuring SECs could plan and execute engagement events like those piloted with Connecting Cabra.
- Find Your Flow: Ready-to-use templates and project inspiration allow SECs to translate planning into action, fostering community-driven project development.

### Outcomes

- Centralised Resource Hub: The website became a go-to platform for SECs, providing them with all the tools and resources needed to execute successful community projects.
- Improved Project Coordination: The platform's tools helped SECs better align their teams and streamline project planning and execution.
- Increased Efficiency: By offering practical templates and guides, [FromPlanToDo.ie](https://www.fromplanto.do.ie) helped reduce the time and effort required to organise and run SEC initiatives.

### Long-Term Impact

- Sustained Platform Growth: The website has the potential to expand over time, incorporating more tools and resources to meet the evolving needs of SECs.
- Enhanced Collaboration: By fostering stronger connections between SECs and providing clear resources, the platform





Phase 3: Prototyping

has the potential to facilitate long-term collaboration across communities.

- Catalyst for Widespread Change: As SECs adopt and utilise the website's tools, they are likely to see a broader impact in terms of community-driven sustainability initiatives across the region.

### Activity 10: SEC Networking Event

As part of the "From Plan To Do" project, hosting an SEC (Sustainable Energy Community) Networking Event emerged as a potential opportunity to foster connection, share insights, and cross-pollinate ideas among various SECs. This event not only reinforced the project's objectives but also provided an invaluable platform for collaboration and knowledge exchange, enhancing the shared sense of purpose among SEC members.

#### Concept and Objectives

The SEC Networking Event was designed to be both informative and interactive. The primary goals were to:

- Bring together diverse SECs from across Dublin and beyond.
- Provide an open forum for sharing successful practices, challenges, and creative solutions.
- Introduce the "From Plan To Do" resources and demonstrate their practical applications.
- Foster a network that could encourage future joint projects, mentorships, and partnerships.

#### Event Structure

The event was structured around a mix of presentations, breakout sessions, and collaborative workshops:

- Opening Session: We began with an overview of the "From

Phase 3: Prototyping



# Shaping



Filming in Progress

Please come and chat with us  
if you don't want to be filmed







Plan To Do” project, highlighting its origins, objectives, and the core learnings we aimed to share. This provided attendees with a cohesive understanding of how the resources could be utilised within their own communities.

- **Case Study Presentations:** Connecting Cabra shared their journey from initial planning to actionable projects. Their presentations detailed tangible steps, such as community mobilisation and co-design practices that had proven effective. This portion spotlighted real-world examples of implementing the principles outlined on the [FromPlanToDo.ie](https://www.fromplanto.do) platform.
- **Workshops and Discussions:** Breakout groups facilitated hands-on discussions focused on different project types relevant to SECs — such as renter engagement, energy-saving initiatives, and community outreach methods. Each group was equipped with templates and prototype materials we had developed, including the DIY Community project template, to guide and inspire ideation.
- **Networking Breaks:** To ensure attendees could engage informally, networking breaks were interspersed throughout the agenda. These moments allowed participants to share insights and establish direct lines of communication that could support future partnerships.

### DIY Community Project Template Introduction

A key highlight of the event was showcasing the DIY Community project template. This template was conceptualised based on earlier workshops, particularly from the insights gained during renter-focused co-design sessions. The template serves as a blueprint for SECs looking to implement community-driven projects that involve collective effort, reminiscent of traditional Irish meitheal — a co-operative work group approach.

- **Interactive Demonstration:** Attendees were guided through the structure of the DIY Community template, exploring





sections such as project planning phases, role allocation, and the incorporation of participatory engagement methods. They were encouraged to workshop how this template could be tailored to meet their community-specific needs.

- **Feedback Loop:** This section was invaluable for gathering real-time feedback on the utility of the template, which informed later refinements and further iterations to enhance its usability across a broader range of SECs.

### Outcomes and Insights

The event exceeded expectations in terms of participation and the breadth of ideas exchanged:

- **Cross-SEC Collaborations:** Several SECs expressed keen interest in adopting shared projects, such as local workshops on energy-saving measures and joint awareness campaigns. This highlighted a shift from isolated efforts to a more interconnected SEC ecosystem.
- **Community Solutions for Renters:** Echoing our renter-focused workshop insights, multiple attendees shared their experiences with renter-specific challenges and potential community-based solutions. This further reinforced the relevance of creating dedicated resources, such as the renter's booklet.
- **Feedback on Prototypes:** The direct feedback on the DIY Community template and other resources underscored their potential as powerful tools for enabling SECs to take actionable steps. Participants found the template's practicality and simplicity helpful, with some SECs expressing interest in pilot-testing it in their next projects.

### Long-Term Impact

The SEC Networking Event laid the groundwork for continued collaboration and strengthened the collective voice of Dublin's SECs. By connecting with each other and

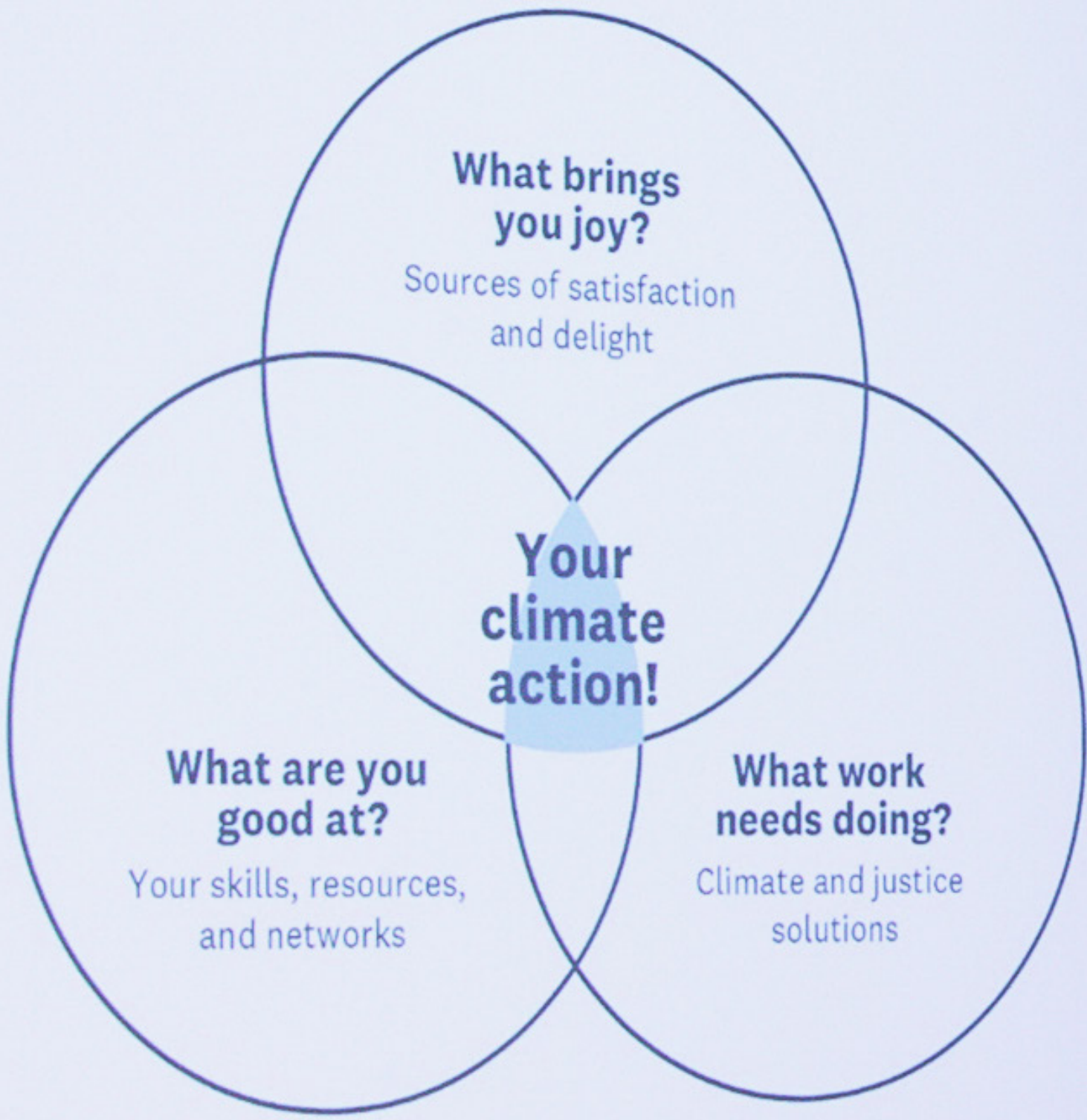




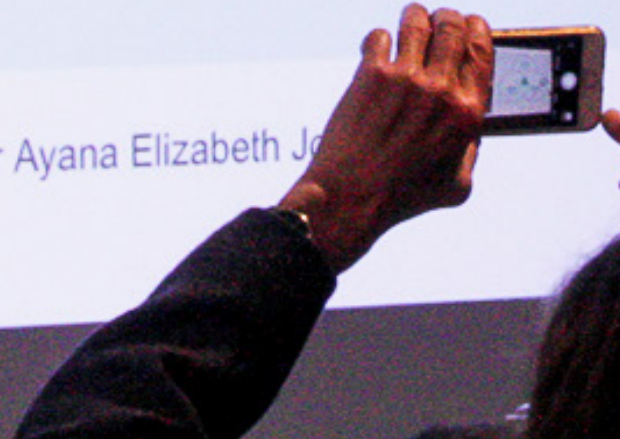
exploring shared solutions, SECs left equipped with renewed enthusiasm, actionable ideas, and the tools to further their impact. The event not only showcased the effectiveness of the “From Plan To Do” resources but also fostered a supportive network poised for sustainable growth and mutual assistance. Following the event, enquiries were received from one SEC, and one SEC mentor wishing to use the tools and learn from the examples shared.







Climate venn- Dr Ayana Elizabeth J





# Evaluation

## Output Summary

### Engagement Numbers

- 27 Sustainable Energy Communities engaged with
- 60+ Renters engaged with (in-person and online)
- 300+ Members of the public engaged with in person
- 14,000+ Members of the public reached online

### Social Media Engagement

- Climate Chats and Chips Renter's Co-Design Event shared on Instagram by:
  - Bohs Climate Co-Op: Follower Count = 1,435
  - Connecting Cabra: Follower Count = 1,118
  - Context Studio: Follower Count = 165
  - Cosybatter: Follower Count = 495
  - Phibsboro SEC: Follower Count = 1,194
- WhatsApp CATU Network = 200+
- IDI Award Win announcement for "From Plan To Do"
  - IDI Ireland: Follower Count = 9,423
- Estimated overall social engagement reach = 14,000 +

### Media

- Videos:
  - Climate Chats and Chips Renter's Co-Design Event Video: <https://vimeo.com/1008813257>
  - SEC Networking Event Video: <https://vimeo.com/1058315313>
- Photos:
  - Discovery Workshops Photos: <https://www.fromplantodo.ie/discovery-photos>
  - Climate Chats and Chips Renter's Co-Design Workshop Photos: <https://www.fromplantodo.ie/co-design-photos>
  - Prototyping and BuzzFest Event Photos: <https://www.fromplantodo.ie/prototyping-photos>
  - SEC Networking Event Photos: <https://www.fromplantodo.ie/sec-event-photos>





**Recognition**

- Received an IDI Irish Design Award for Service & Strategic Design in November 2024

**Post Project Conclusion**

- Inclusion in the SEC Handbook produced by SEAI
- Presentation at SEAI Webinar February 2025





## Project Findings

### 1. Over-Reliance on Retrofitting Solutions

SECs often “lean-in” to retrofitting solutions for their projects as these are seen as the most straightforward due to the available resources and established processes. While retrofitting is valuable, it tends to focus on middle-class homeowners who are likely to pursue these improvements over time and have access to national resources for information. This approach isolates significant segments of the community, such as renters, and does not align with the broader community development missions of many SECs.

The emphasis on retrofitting also means SECs may feel disempowered to explore decarbonisation projects outside of this scope due to the focus of SEAI resources and communication. The service design process identified these tendencies but also uncovered the value of parallel initiatives within SEC’s – inclusive activities which energise and engage, keeping communities vibrant while the long process of retrofitting continues.

### 2. Community Engagement and Inclusivity is vital for the long-term impact of an SEC

Successful SECs recognise the importance of inclusive community engagement to build long-term impact and participation. Workshops like the persona mapping exercise and renter-focused co-design events have shown that understanding community demographics and their specific needs can enhance the relevance and effectiveness of sustainability initiatives.

The application of service design methodologies was pivotal in this context, enabling SECs to uncover deeper insights into community motivations and barriers. The creation of detailed user personas, as demonstrated in

Connecting Cabra’s approach, allowed SECs to challenge assumptions and design targeted solutions that resonate with diverse groups. Initiatives that foster inclusivity, such as informal, approachable workshops, strengthen community ties and encourage active participation. These methods ensured that community voices were central to the project’s design, driving more relevant and impactful outcomes.

### 3. A Broad Focus of Activities Sustains Community Engagement

SECs that maintain a broad focus in their activities tend to stay mobilised and manage community engagement more effectively. Connecting Cabra exemplifies this approach by incorporating diverse projects, such as fruit tree giveaways and bat walks, alongside energy-focused initiatives. This broad strategy not only keeps the community interested and involved but also builds trust and relationships over time. It encourages incremental steps toward retrofitting and climate action by creating consistent community value. From an SEC leadership perspective, having a variety of project topics helps distribute responsibilities, preventing burnout and ensuring continuous community activity. Different leaders can take turns focusing on their areas of expertise, maintaining overall momentum and community interest.

### 4. Co-Design and Prototyping Reassure and Simplify Tasks

Co-design and prototyping can break down overwhelming tasks and instil confidence in project execution. An example of this was an initial Word document with renter tips created by an SEC, which remained unused due to uncertainty about its comprehensiveness and format. Through co-design workshops, renters contributed their input, providing reassurance that the content was relevant and valuable. The prototyping phase involved testing simple booklets during community events like “BuzzFest” and “Eat the Streets”,



gathering feedback and refining the format. This approach alleviated the pressure on the SEC to perfect the document before distribution and demonstrated that a straightforward, user-approved draft could be effective. By involving the community early on, the project overcame obstacles that have previously stalled progress.

### **5. Volunteers face Challenges in Sustainable Energy Communities (SECs)**

Sustainable Energy Communities often rely heavily on volunteers who balance their commitments with other professional and personal obligations. This reliance results in significant time constraints, which can impact project timelines and outcomes. Volunteers often face bandwidth limitations, particularly when SECs depend on part-time or retired members.

The challenge of volunteer retention is further compounded by the administrative burden they bear, such as paperwork, funding applications, and meeting coordination. Addressing these issues through structured support mechanisms, role specialisation, and clear workload distribution can lead to more effective project implementation and volunteer satisfaction. Service design methodologies helped highlight these challenges and provided strategies to streamline volunteer roles and responsibilities.

### **6. There is a strong Need for Technical and Project Management Expertise**

A key barrier for many SECs in moving from planning to actionable projects is the lack of in-house technical and project management expertise. These skills are crucial for navigating complex decarbonisation initiatives and effectively coordinating multi-stakeholder projects. While passionate volunteers drive projects, they may not have the specialised

knowledge required for technical decision-making or comprehensive project oversight. This results in a reliance on external experts, which can delay progress and increase costs. Design research methodologies allowed the project to uncover these expertise gaps and develop pathways for SECs to address them through peer learning and strategic partnerships. Applying these methods helped illustrate how structured, human-centered design can empower SECs to move forward confidently and independently.

### **7. Navigating Funding presents a challenge to Financial Sustainability**

Accessing funding and ensuring financial sustainability remain significant hurdles for SECs. Many groups struggle with the complex, retrospective nature of grant funding that requires upfront capital. This challenge disproportionately affects communities with fewer financial resources, contributing to inequities in project capacity. The administrative complexity of funding applications also acts as a deterrent, creating additional barriers to progress.

The use of service design principles, such as collaborative prototyping and stakeholder workshops, enabled the project to develop clear, user-friendly resources to simplify the funding process. Best practices observed include leveraging multiple funding sources, forming strategic partnerships with local authorities for bridging finance, and engaging in group funding applications with other SECs. These approaches, informed by service design insights, should help SECs build more robust financial strategies.



# Evaluation

## Project Evaluation Overview

The "From Plan To Do" project set out to prove that service design could effectively help Sustainable Energy Communities (SECs) transition from planning into tangible action. The project's structured approach — rooted in discovery research, co-design, and prototyping — demonstrated significant results in helping SECs build and implement creative projects.

The initial research phase, involving 12 interviews and workshops with SECs, was essential for uncovering challenges based on the lived experience of these communities. This qualitative research provided in-depth insights into volunteer limitations, technical knowledge gaps, and funding complexities. These findings informed the development of targeted strategies, showing that service design's emphasis on deep listening and understanding was pivotal for diagnosing core issues and tailoring solutions.

Co-design played a powerful role in engaging SECs directly in the creation of actionable tools. The interactive sessions, such as the persona workshops and renter-focused events, empowered communities to co-create solutions that aligned with their specific needs. In Connecting Cabra, this approach allowed the SEC to address the needs of renters — a previously underserved group — through the development of the "Climate Chats & Chips" workshop. This led to the creation of a user-tested renter's booklet with practical decarbonisation advice, demonstrating how service design turned abstract plans into concrete, community-driven results.

Prototyping further enhanced the project's impact by enabling rapid iteration and real-world testing. The renter's booklet, developed through collaborative prototyping, was shared at community events where feedback refined the final product. This iterative process validated that service design could transform initial concepts into practical, user-endorsed resources that SECs could adopt and replicate.



Connecting  
an  
community, when it

“Climate  
to, inviting local  
sation and build



Context Studio  
People centred service

The “Find Your Fit, Find Your Focus, Find Your Flow” framework, made available on [www.fromplantodo.ie](http://www.fromplantodo.ie) exemplified how research insights could be synthesised into a clear roadmap that SECs could follow. This service design tool helped SECs identify strengths, plan strategically, and progress beyond initial planning stages. By guiding communities through structured phases of planning and execution, the project showcased how service design can build momentum and equip SECs with the confidence and tools needed to move forward.

Overall, “From Plan To Do” proved that service design methodologies — rooted in research, co-design, and prototyping — can empower SECs to transition from the planning phase to practical, community-driven actions. The project’s inclusive tools and adaptable strategies have set a foundation for other SECs to follow, ensuring that sustainable community-led projects are both achievable and impactful.

The work has been picked up the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland – who administer the SEC scheme. Assets and tools from the project were shared in February 2025 via SEAI webinar, and SEAI newsletter to SECs.



# Conclusion

The “From Plan to Do” project has made a significant impact on Sustainable Energy Communities (SECs) by identifying, highlighting, and addressing key barriers and empowering communities to transition from planning to meaningful action. Through an approach rooted in service design, the project demonstrated the importance of involving communities in the creation and testing of solutions. This methodology not only built trust and engagement but also ensured that the tools developed were practical, user-centric, and adaptable.

Research and workshops conducted throughout the project revealed that SECs face numerous challenges, including volunteer fatigue, administrative burdens, and the complexity of securing funding. However, the insights gained through discovery workshops, such as the one in Dundrum, and co-design events highlighted that solutions could be developed by focusing on inclusivity and broad community participation.

Prototyping emerged as a pivotal element in translating plans into action. The renter’s booklet exemplified this by offering tangible, user-friendly solutions that resonated with renters’ needs. The iterative feedback and testing phases underscored the power of involving end users in the design process, allowing for refinement and increased community buy-in. This practical, action-oriented approach enabled SECs to replicate successful strategies, fostering a culture of shared learning and innovation.

The launch of the [FromPlanToDo.ie](https://fromplanto.do.ie) platform represented a milestone in centralising resources and simplifying the pathway for SECs to implement projects. The platform’s tools and templates, alongside its focus on role alignment and project planning, have already proven to be valuable assets in streamlining SEC initiatives.

The SEC Networking Event further emphasised the importance of cross-community collaboration, inspiring attendees to explore joint projects and share best practices.



- 7 - 7:30pm: *Special Panel: Community Engagement beyc diverse communities*

The project's success highlights that service design can be a transformative tool for SECs, guiding them from the initial planning phase to tangible, community-led outcomes. By fostering a culture of co-design, continuous learning, and adaptive prototyping, "From Plan to Do" has set a robust foundation for future SEC initiatives. The lessons learned and resources created will continue to support SECs in overcoming challenges and sustaining their climate action efforts, ensuring long-term impact and community resilience.





# Appendix

## Research Insights

### Common Challenges of SEC's

#### Relying on Volunteers

- Time constraints and bandwidth limitations for part-time members: SEC members often have limited time and bandwidth due to their part-time volunteer status, which can affect their effectiveness.
  - Demographics of volunteers: Because of people's working schedules, and busy family lives, they can often be reliant on retirees which limits diversity in demographics and community network penetration
  - Limited time to dedicate: Many SEC volunteers are passionate about climate activism in many forms. In communities where there are other groups dedicated to environmental activism such as tidy towns, biodiversity groups, beach/canal clean ups, they often have multiple and conflicting time commitments which limit ability to dedicate to SECs.
- Difficulty in keeping volunteers engaged and retaining them: SECs struggle with maintaining volunteers' commitment and involvement, which can be attributed to factors such as lack of motivation and limited resources. This can also lead to unbalanced responsibilities, causing burnout in very active volunteers.
- Struggles with collaboration and coordination among volunteers, leading to difficulties in achieving collective goals.
  - Volunteers don't always have an evenly distributed set of skills in both technical and programme management skillsets required to run projects successfully.
- Burden of administrative tasks on volunteers: Volunteers often bear a significant administrative load, including paperwork, funding applications, coordinating volunteers and organising meetings, diverting their focus from core activities.



### Lack of Professional Expertise

- Lack of technical expertise within the community: SECs face a shortage of technical expertise (energy technical expertise - being able to talk to engineers and suppliers) required for implementing energy projects, which can hinder successful execution and the ability to support the members of the community in the way that might be required.
- Lack of project management expertise within the SEC: The level of project management skills required to successfully plan and implement a complex stakeholder project like community decarbonisation projects is huge, not every SEC has these skills.
- High administrative load and director duties for being a company limited by guarantee specifically: SECs operating as a company limited by guarantee face additional administrative burdens and director duties. (SECs that want to manage finances at a bigger scale must go through this process)

### Structural Issues

- Desire for a flat organisational structure: Some SECs prefer a flat organisational structure to promote inclusivity, but establishing and maintaining such a structure can be challenging.
- Steep learning curve in understanding the complexities of the SEC structure: New members often face a steep learning curve in understanding the intricacies of the SEC structure, objectives, and processes, and where they might fit in to the SEC and start on new projects.
- Successful SECs leverage their network and connections for discovering and accessing funding streams, and partnerships for projects. New SECs starting off are at a huge disadvantage by not having these wide networks or funding knowledge in some cases.

### Financial and Technical Support

- Limited support with group schemes: SECs encounter difficulties in accessing support for group schemes, both pathways of execution, and funding avenues
- Worry over recommended suppliers: SECs find it difficult obtaining recommendations for reliable suppliers and hold concern over recommending as a voluntary group with limited knowledge of suppliers in case challenges arise with their recommendation. Recommendations for suppliers is a huge request from the community when it comes to retrofitting measures.
- Need for clear guidelines and pathways: SECs express a need for clear guidelines and pathways to navigate funding applications, project management, and community engagement.
- From the register of opportunities in the Energy Master Plans:
  - No clear pathways of operating: There is confusion over the steps required for tackling the big challenges outlined in the EMP – there is a lot of figuring it out on their own, this can be a waste of time and resources.
  - Project options are so broad – they often don't know where to start.

### Risk

SECs may consider becoming a legal entity to mitigate the financial and legal risks associated with their activities, for greater accountability, access to funding opportunities and long-term sustainability.

- SECs face financial risks associated with taking on projects, as they often require upfront funding and reimbursement processes. There is a burden on volunteers who may have to spend their own money on projects, and wealthier areas have more resources for larger projects.



- SECs face reputational risks when recommending suppliers or projects. The confusion surrounding supplier relationships, different companies, prices, and policies can lead to potential reputational damage.
- SECs face a high administrative load, particularly if they are structured as a company limited by guarantee. Director duties, audits, and other administrative tasks can be overwhelming for volunteers.
- SECs struggle with accessing funding and dealing with complex funding streams. The application process is stressful and time-consuming, and grants are often retrospective, paid after the fact. Upfront funding is a massive challenge for most community-led groups.

## Challenges of Community Engagement

- Many community members are unaware of the benefits and opportunities associated with sustainable energy initiatives. There is a lack of understanding about the impact of energy consumption on the environment and the potential for cost savings through energy efficiency measures.
- Community residents face challenges in accessing accurate and reliable information about sustainable energy options, available grants and funding, and the process of implementing energy-saving measures. This lack of information hinders their ability to make informed decisions and take action.
- The upfront costs associated with retrofitting and adopting sustainable energy solutions can be a significant barrier for communities. Many individuals and households may not have the financial resources to invest in energy-efficient technologies or undertake large-scale retrofits.
- Building trust within the community is crucial for successful engagement. However, there is often skepticism and mistrust towards new technologies, vendors, and government initiatives. Community members may be hesitant to participate due to concerns about hidden costs,

poor quality installations, or unrealistic promises.

- Effective communication plays a vital role in engaging communities. Language barriers, complex technical jargon, and the use of unfamiliar terms related to sustainable energy can hinder effective communication and understanding. It is important to convey information in a clear and accessible manner to ensure inclusivity.
- Engaging the entire community and fostering active participation can be challenging. Different segments of the community may have varying levels of interest, knowledge, and motivation to engage in sustainable energy initiatives. Overcoming apathy and encouraging widespread participation requires targeted outreach efforts and tailored messaging.
- Sustainable energy projects require resources, expertise, and coordination. Many communities may lack the necessary skills, knowledge, and capacity to plan and implement energy-saving measures effectively. Access to trained professionals, technical support, and funding for capacity-building initiatives is essential.
- Cultural norms, social dynamics, and community values can influence the acceptance and adoption of sustainable energy practices. Understanding and addressing these factors is crucial for engaging diverse communities and ensuring that initiatives align with their specific needs and aspirations.
- Communities may face challenges due to existing policies, regulations, and bureaucratic processes that hinder the implementation of sustainable energy projects. Streamlining procedures, providing incentives, and advocating for supportive policies can help overcome these barriers.
- Engaging communities in sustainable energy initiatives requires long-term commitment and sustained effort. Building relationships, establishing trust, and maintaining ongoing communication and support are essential for successful engagement.



## Best Practices for SEC's

### Volunteer Engagement and Mission Alignment

- Flexible volunteering hours foster participation and commitment. For instance, allowing volunteers to contribute based on their availability.
- Emphasising the mission and values aligns collective efforts towards a common goal. This is achieved by collaboratively deciding the mission and values of the community as a group, from the beginning.
- Engaging individuals with shared interests in various aspects of environmental activism enhances collaboration and collective action, creating more momentum with sustainable energy. This involves engaging with like-minded people and focusing on what they want to achieve from their volunteering.
- Understanding the needs and desires of community members tailors initiatives to preferences and context, increasing engagement and impact.

### Leadership and Organisational Structure

- Distinct strands or focus areas within communities allow for specialisation. This is demonstrated in Connecting Cabra, where they have different strands of focus within the community (eg. Active Travel, Biodiversity, Sustainable Energy).
- Assigning different leaders to each strand, with a rotation of focus for the SEC ensures effective management, building consistent momentum while allowing for individual leaders to have down time.
- A core group of dedicated individuals ensures continuity and leadership. Successful SECs achieve this by maintaining a core leadership group of at least three people.

- A larger informed group provides a diverse range of perspectives and skills for projects. The presence of a larger group of at least ten people, to support the core leadership committee, ensures a distributed workload for project implementation.

### Partnerships and Networking

- Collaborating with local partnerships and boards provides access to resources, support, funding, and networking opportunities. Examples of these partnerships that successful SECs have leveraged include Údaras na Gaeltacha, various County Councils, and Fáilte Ireland.
- Technical experts within the community bring specialised knowledge. This is achieved by enlisting technical professionals who understand the ins and outs of energy projects and can advise appropriately.
- Building connections and partnerships with other communities and organisations maintains momentum and progress. It builds capacity, funding opportunities, and widens the network and impact of projects. This could be local GAA clubs, tidy towns networks, or churches.

### Collective Knowledge and Sharing

- Success breeds success, and many successful sustainable energy projects have learned from their peers. This has involved networking, and sharing case studies to help others learn and find inspiration from successful projects.
- Sharing knowledge and applying for funding together with other SECs strengthens collective impact. Triple SEC are an example of this, Cosybatter, Phibsborough SEC and Connecting Cabra combined forces to share knowledge and successfully applied for funding together for an EU initiative.
- Collecting and analysing energy monitoring data from projects provides valuable insights. For example, with



the Dairy Farmers SEC, energy monitoring data could be shared with other businesses in the industry.

### Funding and Financial Sustainability

- Diverse funding sources, including international funding, increase financial stability. This requires being eligible for international funding, which often requires becoming a legal entity.
- SECs that have established themselves as a legal entity, gain the capacity to take on larger funding projects, due to the nature of the funds being retrospective. It allows them to access finance until the funding is drawn down, which solves a cash flow issue.
- Utilising voucher schemes and MOUs with local authorities to bridge funding gaps.
- Sustaining the SEC with project management work streams to capture additional income available for the project management fee % available on SEAI grants. Dunleer SEC have established this paid service to assist other SECs.

### Community Development and Engagement

- SECs that see themselves as community development organisations and focus their efforts on what would benefit the community, tend to achieve more long term sustainable impact in their communities.
- Community developers, with their strong communication and organisational skills, play a key role in encouraging community participation in SECs.
- Involving the community in decision-making processes fosters a sense of ownership. This is achieved by getting input from the community and supporting their ideas.
- Providing ongoing support and follow-up after the initial stages ensures sustained progress. This includes continuing support and follow-up after the initial stages.

- Showcasing retrofitted buildings engages community and helps people understand the benefits of retrofitting, how it feels to be in a warm building, how the technology works, and how energy is managed.

### Learning and Development

- Learning from pilot projects and sharing findings with other communities promotes knowledge exchange, and builds momentum.
- Sector-based Sustainable Energy Communities (SECs) allow for focused efforts and targeted solutions, developing sector based decarbonisation expertise. This is proven by the effectiveness of sector-based SECs such as the tourism and hospitality SEC in West Kerry.
- Utilising online platforms, like Facebook groups and community forums, facilitates peer-to-peer learning and meaningful conversations. Engaging in discussions and accessing real-life case studies can empower individuals to make informed decisions.

### Energy Efficiency Measures and Implementation

- Encouraging group schemes where multiple households collaborate for energy upgrades allows for cost savings. This approach is seen in group schemes where multiple houses come together to implement energy-efficient solutions such as insulation, solar panels and heat pumps. By working together, homeowners can reduce individual cost and streamline the process.
- Implementing LED lighting as a cost-effective measure reduces energy consumption and costs for the community. This could involve engaging with sporting organisations to make a simple transition to LED lighting.
- Adding draft stoppers, applying insulating film on windows and implementing temporary retrofitting measures can prevent the waste of energy in homes.



## What Works when Engaging Communities

### Peer-to-Peer Recommendations

Encouraging individuals who have already undergone retrofitting to share their experiences and recommendations with others can be highly influential. Positive word-of-mouth from trusted sources can motivate others to follow suit.

### Personal Connections

Building personal connections through one-on-one conversations is a powerful way to engage individuals. Taking the time to listen and provide tailored solutions helps build trust and encourages participation.

### Webinars and Local Presenters

Hosting webinars with local presenters who are knowledgeable about sustainable energy has been highly successful in engaging the community. People trust and relate to their neighbours, making the information more relatable and impactful.

### Showcase Buildings

Showcasing successful retrofit projects in the community, such as The Yard Hub, allows people to experience firsthand what a successful retrofit feels like. This helps them visualise the benefits and motivates them to take action.

### Community Organisations

Collaborating with local community organisations, such as schools, churches, and community centers, provides a platform for education and engagement. These organisations can host workshops, exhibitions, and talks to raise awareness and inspire action.

### Collective Tendering

Bundling multiple houses together to negotiate with vendors can lead to cost savings and make retrofitting more affordable for residents. This approach also fosters a sense of community and collective action.

### Emotional Engagement

Making sustainable energy emotionally engaging is crucial. Highlighting the positive impacts on health, comfort, and future generations helps people connect on a deeper level and motivates them to participate.

### Clarity over Financial Implications

Providing clear information about the financial implications of retrofitting, such as payback periods and available financing options, helps individuals make informed decisions. Explaining the potential cost savings and comfort improvements can be persuasive.

### Education and Awareness

Publicising sustainable energy initiatives through various channels, including local media, social media, and community events, helps raise awareness and educate the wider community. Sharing success stories and case studies can inspire others to take action.

### Trust and Expertise

Engaging experts and professionals who are trusted within the community helps build credibility and trust. Having local spokespeople who understand the challenges and needs of the community can effectively communicate the benefits of sustainable energy.



### Collaboration with Local Authorities

Working closely with local authorities can help amplify the message and gain support for sustainable energy initiatives. When local authorities recognise the value and importance of these projects, it brings extra weight and relevance to the community.

### Flexibility and Autonomy

Allowing communities to define their own autonomy and have flexibility in implementing sustainable energy solutions increases buy-in and participation. Communities should feel empowered to contribute their ideas and suggestions, fostering a sense of ownership.

### Infographics and Visuals

Creating visually appealing infographics and visuals that clearly explain the pros and cons of energy retrofitting can help simplify complex information. Visual aids make it easier for individuals to understand and remember key points.

### Transparency and Honesty

Providing a multidimensional case study that includes both successes and challenges helps build trust and honesty. Sharing practical advice and lessons learned, including what homeowners would do differently next time, empowers individuals with all the necessary information.



